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The emergence and influence of group leaders in web-based collaborative writing:

Self-reported accounts of EFL learners

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Abstract

Web-based collaborative writing (CW) has been widely used in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) during the last decade. Previous studies have mainly focused on how online platforms have facilitated the CW process for EFL learners, how web-based CW has shown progress in EFL learners' writing development, and how EFL learners in groups interact with one another during web-based CW. However, there are limited studies on web-based CW among Turkish EFL learners. The aim of this study was to analyse Turkish high school EFL learners' self-reported accounts of their writing process in English with the support of group leaders in a web-based CW activity. The key findings were that first, the groups found the need to elect a group leader to act as a facilitator for other group members, and that group members found their group leader's help in planning their writing tasks and corrective feedback useful for their learning; second, group leaders provided affective support during the writing activity, with group members reporting that praise and motivational phrases received from their group leaders increased their self-confidence and motivation towards writing in English. This study contributes to knowledge about improving high school EFL learners' writing through a web-based CW activity. The peer leadership approach is promising in supporting student self-efficacy and self-regulation in learning and is easily applicable by teachers in other contexts who wish to promote writing activities outside of the classroom setting.

Keywords

Web-based collaborative writing, English as a Foreign Language, group leaders, peer facilitation

Introduction

Collaborative writing (CW) can be defined as “the co-authoring of a text by two or more writers” according to Storch (2013:2). This pedagogical activity has gained momentum among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and EFL researchers during the last decade which could be considered partially powered by the widespread availability of web-based platforms. Web-based CW activities in the field of EFL have been commonly used in wikis (e.g. Li & Zhu, 2013; Chao & Lo, 2011; Lin & Yang, 2011; Kessler, 2009; Lund, 2008), Google Docs (e.g. Alsubaie & Ashuraidah, 2017), weblogs (e.g. Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010) and Facebook groups (e.g. Bani-Hani et al., 2014).

Previous studies on web-based CW in the context of EFL have shown that online tools (wikis, Google Docs, blogs and Facebook groups) enhanced the CW process for EFL learners (e.g. Lund 2008; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; Lin & Yang, 2011; Chao & Lo, 2011; Bani-Hani et al., 2014). Web-based CW has been shown to improve EFL learners’ writing development in studies by e.g. Bani-Hani et al., 2014; Miyazoe and Anderson, 2010; Kessler, 2009. Some studies (e.g. Li & Zhu, 2013) have investigated peer interaction patterns in web-based CW and have found three types of online peer-interaction patterns which were (a) collectively contributing, (b) authoritative-responsive, and (c) dominant- withdrawn. Even though empirical studies on web-based collaborative writing to date have explored different aspects of collaboration among EFL learners, there are limited studies on web-based CW among Turkish EFL learners (e.g. Aydin & Yildiz, 2014). It is for this reason that we undertook this research to investigate Turkish high school EFL learners’ self-reported accounts of their writing process in English with the support of group leaders in a web-based CW activity.

Previous research on the presence / roles of group leaders in web-based small group learning contexts

According to Damon and Phelps (1989), when one learner instructs another learner in a substantive way, the first acts as an expert and the second as a novice. This concept resonates with the work of Vygotsky (1978) who asserted that when learners scaffold each other, they modify a task and offer assistance to each other to help complete the task. The concept has been extended and labelled in different ways depending on the context and includes, for example, ‘peer teaching’ (Bradford-Watts, 2011) and ‘peer tutoring’ (Topping, 1996; Boud, Cohen & Sampson, 2001). Britz, Dixon, and McLaughlin (1989) developed the term of ‘peer learning’. In this research, we chose to label this concept as ‘peer facilitation’ which is defined by Ashwin (2003) as students who support other students’ learning while learning themselves.

Boud, Cohen, and Sampson (2001) listed the advantages of peer facilitation for students’ learning:

- Peer facilitation affords students with opportunities to learn from the knowledge and experience of those similar to themselves;
- It provides learners with ways to teach each other and learn in both formal and informal ways;
- It is mutually beneficial and involves the sharing of knowledge, ideas and experience between participants with comparable levels of knowledge and roles;
- It places a strong emphasis on critical thinking, problem solving and the construction of knowledge.

With regard to web-based peer facilitation in an EFL context, we found the following studies particularly apposite. In a study by Chao and Lo (2011), participants (N=51) formed their groups of four to five members and elected one member as a group leader. However, in

their study, little information was provided about the roles of group leaders during the web-based CW activity. In a similar study, Li and Zhu (2013) found that one of the patterns of peer interaction (authoritative-responsive) in an EFL web-based CW activity, was where one group member became the most influential during the exercise and played the role of group leader; other group members followed the group member who took charge of the task. Li and Zhu's study focused on exploring online interaction patterns during a wiki-based CW exercise using three groups of three Chinese EFL learners at a Chinese University. The findings of Li and Zhu's study, based on Storch's (2002) framework on peer interaction patterns in a CW activity, revealed three types of interaction patterns had been observed: (1) collectively contributing, (2) authoritative-responsive, and (3) dominant-withdrawn. In a study by Lan, Sung, and Chang (2006), focused on peer collaboration with regard to reading in an EFL context using mobile devices, it was found that group leaders in small reading groups were keen to help their group partners to learn and to provide feedback during collaborative reading exercises.

Peer Affective support is viewed as a basic provision of close personal relationships (Cunningham & Barbee, 2000) and is considered as an important determinant of satisfaction within these. People value the emotional support skills of their relationship partners and perceptions of emotional supportiveness have been found to play a critical role in the development and maintenance of friendships, romances, family and work relationships (Burleson, 2003). Concerning peer emotional support in writing, as argued by Scott and Rockwell (1997), learners' emotions and motivation can affect the way they learn. For instance, anxiety that arises from the pressure of learning a language can result in low productivity, dislike or fear of writing. Therefore, when producing written work together, Gebhardt (1980) suggested that peers might offer each other emotional support to decrease anxiety and increase the motivation for writing.

Studies that have focused on the affective component include the work of Jones and Issroff (2005) drawing on Keller's Model of Motivation (1987), that categorised four dimensions of affective factors in computer-supported collaborative learning: (1) curiosity, (2) challenge, (3) confidence, and (4) control. A study by Bani-Hani et al (2004) examined how Facebook groups enhanced the writing development in English using CW activities of forty-two Jordanian EFL learners. This study showed that 92.9 % of the participants felt comfortable posting their ideas and opinions in their FB groups, 97.6 % of the participants felt encouraged when their group members liked their comments in their FB groups, and 54.8 % of the participants preferred discussing their work in a FB group instead of in a classroom.

Lee (2010), however, conducted research on written peer feedback in an EFL writing context, which was aimed at investigating three different types: (1) praise, (2) criticism and (3) suggestion. Fifteen first-year university students at a Japanese university participated in this study over 14 weeks. The findings of this study indicated that a high percentage of the feedback given took the form of suggestions and a low percentage was praise. According to Lee's interpretation, many participants did not feel confident about praising their peers due to a lack of experience and knowledge about how to give peer feedback.

In this study, we aimed to investigate Turkish high school EFL learners' self-reported accounts of their writing process in English. The EFL learners participating in our study were divided into two groups of three and in each group, participants elected the group leaders of their own volition (they were not supposed to elect a group leader but they made the decision to elect a group leader themselves). In this study, we focus on both the emergence and influence of these group leaders. Specifically, our research questions are:

1. What are the factors that lead to the choice of group leader by group members in the context of a web-based CW activity?

2. How can group leaders influence their group members' writing process in English through the activity?

The Study

We implemented the CW activity outside of the classroom setting, on a social networking site, in a Facebook (FB) group for two main reasons. First, as researchers we were unable to use a classroom setting to undertake our CW activity because EFL teachers in Turkish public high schools are compelled to follow the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum required by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MONE) (2011). EFL teachers are advised not to allow more than 20 minutes for pair / group work activities, and to privilege teacher-student interaction over student-student interaction. For this reason, little time is allocated to extended writing which limits the potential for classroom research. This evident limitation stimulated the idea of planning a web-based CW activity. Second, we were aware that Turkish teenagers are attracted to FB as a social networking site. As pointed out by Demirtas (2012), most of the FB users in Turkey are between the age of 18 and 35, with some 18.1 million online social networking users who are 15 years old and above. Therefore, we decided using FB in this study among teenagers would engage their interest.

We first conducted a pilot study prior to this study that led us to determine the sample size, devise the CW activity, and frame the design of data collection methods to be used for this study. We decided to undertake this study with a sample of six participants, finding that this sample size gave confidence for replicability of a small scale study. In the pilot study, we allocated four weeks to the writing activity, but we noticed that peer collaboration took quite some time to develop. Therefore, we decided to allocate seven weeks to the task.

In the pilot study, we only used group interviews but, for this study, we decided to employ online facilitator-participant chats as well as group interviews because we had observed in the pilot study that some participants could not or did not want to express their opinions or feelings openly in front of their friends. Therefore, in this study, after all the sessions, we had an online individual chat with each participant from both groups through FB to discuss the different group members' perspectives about the influence of group leaders on their writing process in English. Furthermore, anticipating that participants' narratives might not generate sufficient data, we therefore planned to use the participants' online discussion boards in their FB groups to obtain further insights.

Participants

After obtaining official consent from the Provincial Directorate of National Education and the school's principal, a total of six Turkish public high school EFL learners volunteered from a class of 28 to participate in this study voluntarily over seven weeks. These six participants were 10th graders (16 years old, 4 females, 2 males) and they were selected from a public high school in Izmir, the third largest city in Turkey with a population of approximately 3.7 million. We chose this particular public high school in Izmir because this school holds similar characteristics to other public high schools in Turkey. We aimed to focus on public high schools because EFL learners in Turkish public high schools are usually unable to undertake enough writing tasks in English lessons due to factors such as time constraints, exam-oriented classrooms, grammar- / reading-based textbooks and teachers' attitudes towards EFL writing, all of which have the impact of reducing opportunities for students to develop their writing skills as discussed by Aydin and Basoz (2010).

Before undertaking the CW activity in a FB group, the participants were asked to choose their group members to form two groups of three. Storch (2013:163) highlighted the

advantage of allowing students to choose their group members as “students choose to work with peers who work with peers with whom they are familiar, and this means that they may be more comfortable and willing to challenge each other’s suggestions and offer repairs.”

For ethical considerations, these participants’ real names were anonymised. To draw a distinction between the two groups of participants, henceforth, we call the first group (P1, P2 & P3) group A, while the second (P4, P5 & P6) was named group B. Table 1 shows an overview of participants’ pseudonyms, gender, self-assessed English proficiency level and group member familiarity.

Participants self-assessed their English level between elementary / pre-intermediate and intermediate as displayed in Table 1. We also gathered information about participants’ autumn term results from their three exams, their English teacher’s bonus grade and final grade which are displayed in Table 2.

Table 1

Background of participants and their English language self-assessment in proficiency

| Group | Name | Gender | English proficiency | Group member familiarity |
|---------|------|--------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Group 1 | P1 | female | Intermediate | All three participants were classmates and close friends. |
| | P2 | female | Intermediate | |
| | P3 | female | Pre-intermediate/ intermediate | |
| Group 2 | P4 | male | elementary/pre-intermediate | All three participants were classmates. P4 and P5 are close friends but P6 is not a close friend of either P4 or P5 |
| | P5 | male | pre-intermediate | |
| | P6 | female | Intermediate | |

Note. Participants’ English proficiency levels were based on participants’ self-assessments: 1. Starter, 2. Elementary, 3. Pre-intermediate, 4. Intermediate, 5. Upper-intermediate, and 6. Advanced.

Table 2

Participants' final grades in English language lesson obtained by their teachers

| Group | Name | Exam 1 | Exam 2 | Exam 3 | Teacher's bonus grade | Final grade |
|---------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------------------------|-------------|
| Group 1 | P1 | 79 | 82 | 72 | 85 | 4 |
| | P2 | 95 | 87 | 83 | 85 | 5 |
| | P3 | 55 | 64 | 40 | 70 | 3 |
| Group 2 | P4 | 39 | 45 | 40 | 60 | 2 |
| | P5 | 70 | 64 | 76 | 80 | 4 |
| | P6 | 100 | 98 | 95 | 100 | 5 |

Note. In Turkish public high schools, exams are scored out of 100 and they mostly assess students' grammar, vocabulary knowledge and comprehension skills. In most cases, spelling and writing skills are excluded. Teachers' bonus grades include students' performance in the classroom and their ability to complete homework on time. The final grade is scaled out of 5 (1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest).

It can be seen that the participants' self-assessments of their English proficiency in Table 1 is in line with the participants' final grades (1-5) in Table 2 but two participants with the same final grade 4 (P1 and P5) assessed their own English proficiency slightly differently (pre-intermediate and intermediate). We decided that their experience of learning English and their enthusiasm for the writing task made them ideal participants for the research.

Methods

Setting: In this study, six participants in two groups of three were asked to undertake a CW activity with their group members in a FB group created only for the study. Participants were asked to undertake this writing activity outside of school hours online.

Mode of discussion in an FB group: Each group used their first language, Turkish, in written form synchronously, in discussions to produce a piece of CW in English in their FB group. Participants reported to use their smartphones and / or laptops.

Duration: Participants were asked to meet in a FB group to complete their collaborative short story writing activity in 10 sessions within seven weeks. During the study, in session 1, we provided some instructions and information about short story writing for each group of students. In session 2, participants were given a story topic (See Appendix A). From session 2 to 9, students produced their short story with their group members. Session 10 was arranged as a peer feedback session between two groups (see Appendices B and C for summaries of the 10 sessions for both groups).

Collaborative writing task: In the light of the pilot study, we decided to provide a short story topic (see Appendix A) for participants in this study to save them time getting started. Concerning the CW activity for this study, a short story writing task was selected for

three reasons. First, short story writing is considered as an effective way of exploring the target language in a playful and experimental way and it has a motivational potential for EFL learners (Bräuer, 1997). Second, the Turkish MONE (2011:11) has advised EFL teachers covering the secondary school level ELT curriculum that, “creative writing activities [including short story writing tasks] can be employed to make writing skills more enjoyable for students.” Third, very few studies have integrated short story tasks with CW. One such study by Chao and Lo (2011) employed a story script writing task in a CW exercise in an EFL context.

Researchers’ roles: One of the researchers served as the role of a facilitator throughout the writing activity. The facilitator’s role was limited to providing participants in both groups some information about short story writing in English in session 1 and providing with a short story topic and giving some guidance about getting started. Also, this researcher conducted the group interviews and online written facilitator-participant chats (F-P chats). For facilitative questions the facilitator asked the participants, see Appendix D.

Data Collection Methods

We employed the following three data collection methods for this study, (1) group interviews, (2) online written facilitator-participant chats (F-P chats), and (3) Facebook discussion boards. We also kept a research diary to keep track of our research. We decided such methods would enable us to understand the topic under scrutiny in depth and to gain a deeper understanding of our investigation from different perspectives.

Group interviews between facilitator and participants: We employed four group interviews with all six participants throughout the CW task in a Facebook group (The 1st after the third session, the 2nd after the fifth session, the 3rd after the seventh session and the 4th

after the tenth session) to describe and interpret the group leaders' influence on other group members' writing process in English during the writing activity. All four group interviews took place in the school's library and lasted between 1 hour to 1 and a half hours. In all group interviews, participants used Turkish.

Online written facilitator-participant chats (F-P chats): The chats were between individual participant and the facilitator (facilitator had 9 chats with each out of 6 participants, i.e. in total 54 chats). The chats were online and written. We collected this data between session 2 and 10. We have mainly talked about what was peer collaboration particularly group leadership in the session and how this peer collaboration helped or hindered their writing in English during the session. The main purpose of this data collection method was to allow students to share their views or experiences with the facilitator where they were not able to do in the group interviews. Concerning the 54 chats, they each lasted between 10 to 20 minutes. In total, they lasted 742 minutes (it is about 14 minutes per one chat). In total, we collected 2460 threads during these 54 chats. It makes about 46 threads per one chat.

Facebook participants' discussion boards: In order to obtain more detailed information from all six participants' group interviews and online F-P chats, we also collected all the written threads for both groups of participants on their FB discussion boards from all 10 sessions.

Data Analysis

The discussions, online F-P chats as well as FB discussion boards enabled us to gather different types of qualitative data sets. Each data source was analysed using an open coding analytical approach, scrutinizing the data sets, and highlighting emerging codes then reorganizing under thematic headings. We employed open coding because there is no existing parallel research therefore no analytical framework is available in the Turkish public high

school context. Open coding enabled us to identify from scratch key concepts emerging from these data sets.

First, we transcribed all four group interviews (the length of group interviews 1 to 4 is 80, 74, 97 and 50, resp.), as one document in verbatim into Word, then we transferred each participant's individual discussion of online F-P chat threads (in total 2,456 threads) from FB chat to a Word document. This was followed by transferring both groups' FB discussion threads (Group A, 985 discussion threads and Group B, 1,084 discussion threads) which lasted seven weeks, ten sessions for each group, to a Word document. Second, we read the three data sets: group interview transcripts, transferred online F-P chats threads and FB discussion board threads several times so as to familiarise ourselves with the content. Third, before moving to coding, we highlighted in all three data sets, with different colours in three Word documents, the key elements in the form of words, sentences or quotes, which appeared to be relevant to the topic under scrutiny and hence, would help to address the research questions. Fourth, we started to carry out open coding in all three data sets, which involved assigning letters to meaningful codes for each segment in the transcripts and threads. This method enabled us to easily find statements that we wanted to check in transcripts and threads and identify the source of the statement. Fifth, in the three data sets, we undertook more detailed coding which involved clustering and organising the open codes into broader categories which describe the data. Sixth, we analysed the links / interconnections between the three data sets.

To sum up, Table 3 illustrates the codes, categories and concepts that emerged from the group interviews, online F-P chats and FB discussion boards.

Table 3

Coding scheme from the analysis of the three data collection methods (group interviews, online F-P chats, FB discussion boards)

| Codes | Categories | Concept |
|---|---|--|
| Group leaders' decision- making facilitated the pre-writing stage of the CW process (1,2,3) | Leading in a group | Group leaders as facilitators |
| Group members gain knowledge from group leaders (1,2,3) Group members found their group leaders' corrective feedback instructional (1,3) | Facilitating in a group | |
| Group members found the praise received from their group leaders was motivational for writing in English (1,2,3) Group members found motivational phrases received from their group leaders made them gain self-confidence (1,3) | Providing praise and motivational phrases | Group leaders as affective domain supporters |

Note. 1 (group interviews), 2 (online F-P chats), 3 (FB discussion boards).

Findings

First, we look at the crucial selection process for group leaders by group members then we present the summary of the findings in relation to two key concepts (group leaders as facilitators and group leaders as affective domain supporters) that emerged from the analysis as shown in Table 3 above.

Selection of Group Leaders

At the beginning of the writing activity, both groups of participants expressed the need to select a group leader from among their group members when the facilitators' guidance was, for the most part, withdrawn. Concerning the election of a group leader, some participants reported that they felt a need to select someone who seemed to them confident

and knowledgeable about how to chair a group discussion, was comfortable with making decisions about what to write in a session and who, in their estimation, had a better knowledge of English than the other group members.

We observed that by the end of the second session, P1 was chosen as a group leader in group A and P6 was selected in group B and from the third session to the ninth session, these two participants performed the role of leader in their groups. When we asked the participants in the first group interview with all six participants what made them choose a group leader, they all indicated that they did this when it became clear that the facilitator guidance was no longer available. For example,

P3 said, “*Generally, our English teacher tells us what we should do. In this [writing] exercise, as I’ve seen, we’re expected to undertake the exercise in a group without a teacher. However, in the second session, I couldn’t get involved much because there was nobody to tell me what exactly I was supposed to do. I saw P1 was making interesting suggestions for our story. She also seemed to be helpful to me and I proposed her to be the teacher of our group*” (group interview 1).

Some participants reported that their decision to choose a group leader was based on the confidence and chairing capability as well as their group member’s knowledge of English as, according to them, he/she would be able to lead them on account of his/her English knowledge being better than theirs.

Even though P2’s final grade is better than P1’s final grade, P2 thinks that P1’s knowledge and confidence in English are very good. P2 states, for example, that: “*I think in collaborative activities somebody who is more confident and knowledgeable should conduct the group discussions and make decisions for the group.*” (group interview, 1). “*One of the*

good things about this writing exercise was P1 [the group leader] teaching me vocabulary.” (group interview, 2). P2 perceives her English vocabulary knowledge lower than that P1. It may imply that P2 is not so self-confident about her English knowledge despite her excellent final grade.

At the beginning and in the middle of the writing task, the participants were mostly dependent on their group leaders’ assistance and guidance (see Appendices B and C). However, towards the end of the task, the role of group leaders began to diminish. Individual participant agency developed and group members at this stage began to contribute collectively when completing the writing exercise.

Group Leaders as Facilitators

According to participants’ group interview accounts, their group leaders made decisions about what to do at the beginning of each session and allocated individual writing tasks to the members during the production of their short story in English. Therefore, participants considered that their group leaders’ decision-making facilitated the pre-writing stage of the CW process. They also reported that they gained knowledge from their group leaders as they provided linguistic assistance to their group members, such as explaining and exemplifying vocabulary and grammar, as well as how to check linguistic mistakes independently through a website or mobile application. According to the participants’ group interview accounts and online F-P chats, feedback was mainly concerned with correcting grammar mistakes, misuse of vocabulary in a sentence and correcting spelling, punctuation or capitalisation mistakes in writing and participants found their group leaders’ corrective feedback instructional.

Leading in a Group

With regard to the “group leaders’ decision-making facilitating the pre-writing stage of the CW process”, according to P3 for example, her group leader, P1, generated ideas and made decisions before they wrote in each session which helped her and the group to undertake the writing activity:

“If I had to do this [writing] exercise myself, I could never start it. I’m not good at writing in English at all. It takes me ages to generate ideas and put them in writing. When P1 [the group leader] generated ideas and made decisions about what and how we should write in each session helped me and the group a lot. I think this was one of the best things that helped my writing in English so far. I wish I could do group writing with P1 in all writing exercises” (group interview, 2).

Facilitating in a Group

By way of evidence regarding the finding that ‘group members gain knowledge from their group leaders’, P5’s comment is illustrative because he details below what sort of knowledge he gained from his group leader, P6’s tips. Her ‘tips’ included, for example, giving formulae for sentence construction in English (subject+verb+object) and that he felt had helped his writing process in English:

“I believe that P6 is a very good teacher for us [P5 himself and P4], because she noticed that P4 and I were having problems when writing in English individually. Therefore, she gave us some tips about how to write better individually. [...] P6’s tips for writing in English improved my writing in English. At the moment, I feel more confident about writing in English” (group interview, 4).

The following episode was taken from group B’s third session in FB discussion. P6 (the group leader) explains to P4 how to use the simple present continuous tense in a sentence:

P4: Can one of you tell me how to say Sally bu resimde hızlı koşuyor [Sally is running fast in this picture] in English?

P5: Which tense are you going to use?

P4: I think the continuous

P6: Well, in the continuous tense, you first use the subject and then am/is/are and then a verb with –ing.

P4: Ok thanks so “This picture Sally is running fast.” Is this correct?

P6: Well done! Ali😊

Directing group members to online resources to seek solutions for themselves was another strategy used by the leaders. They directed their group members to use online sources such as online bilingual dictionaries, Google translate, grammar and spell checkers.

Table 4 shows how many times group leaders in the two groups provided grammar and vocabulary explanations and how group members could check linguistic mistakes independently through a website or mobile application.

Table 4

Summary of number of times grammar and vocabulary was explained and when ICT tools were suggested by the groups leaders

| | Group A | | | Group B | | |
|---------|---------|------------|-----------|---------|------------|-----------|
| Session | Grammar | Vocabulary | ICT tools | Grammar | Vocabulary | ICT tools |
| 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4 | 6 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| 5 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 2 |

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 3 | 6 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 2 |
| 7 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 0 |
| 8 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 9 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| 10 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |

Note. Group leaders show how group members could check linguistic mistakes independently through ICT tools such as website or mobile application.

It can be seen that linguistic support was relatively high in the early session then steadily decreased although the two groups showed variations that reflect the different group makeup.

As to the point about ‘group leaders’ feedback being instructional’, P3 commented that she had received immediate and detailed feedback from her group leader:

“I found P1’s feedback immediate and more detailed than our teacher of English. When our teacher gave a writing assignment, we handed our writing in to her and we waited a week to get a response from her. However, P1’s feedback was immediate and more detailed. Besides, it helped me notice my mistakes and develop my writing in English” (group interview, 3).

Group Leaders as Affective Domain Supporters

Group leaders praised (e.g. well done!) their group members when they managed to achieve a task during the writing exercise and they used motivational phrases (e.g. we’re with you) when their group members faced difficulties with writing. These were considered by the participants as being key affective factors of their group leaders’ influence on their writing process.

Providing Praise and Motivational Phrases

Praise and motivational phrases were mostly given by the group leaders to support group members, see Appendix E for a complete list of these phrases.

The participants who commented that receiving praise was motivational for writing in English claimed that this per se had a positive influence on their mood and therefore, galvanised them into performing better.

P3 said, *“At the beginning of the writing exercise, I was not willing to share my individual writing with P1 and P2, because I was feeling that it wasn’t very good. However, when I shared it with my group members, they, especially P1 [group leader], liked it very much and she said to me ‘well done’. After hearing that word, I engaged in writing in English individually in the following sessions”* (group interview, 2).

Receiving motivational phrases from their group leaders made them gain self-confidence about writing in English. P4 described how such phrases increased his self-confidence towards writing in English with a metaphor about an audience at a boxing match.

P4 explained, *“At a boxing match, the audience usually say some words, such as ‘keep on, you can do it, don’t give up now’ and especially in films, after hearing these words, boxers stand up and keep fighting with their opponents. This writing exercise for me was like a boxing match. Every time I felt weak when it comes to writing in English, P6’s [the group leader] motivating words made me gain self-confidence and keep on writing [in English]”* (group interview, 2).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed at analysing Turkish high school EFL learners’ self-reported accounts of their writing process in English with the support of group leaders in a web-based CW activity. The analyses of data indicated two key concepts for group leaders’ influence. These were group leaders as facilitators, and group leaders as affective domain supporters.

Concerning group leaders as facilitators, group leaders for each group of participants made decisions about what to do at the beginning of each session and allocated individual writing tasks to their group members during the production of their CW task. They provided orientation, linguistic assistance, made suggestions for reference resources and were always available. The instructional role was one they were aware of and took very seriously. Group leaders also provided peer feedback after their group members had posted their individual writing tasks. The findings about group members explicitly gaining knowledge from group leaders concurs with the findings of Li and Zhu (2013) and Lan, Sung, and Chang (2007). Similar to these studies, in this current study the group leaders provided highly skilled and personalised “scaffolding” (Vygotsky, 1978) in a variety of ways when undertaking the CW exercise. Crucially, in the editing and peer feedback sessions, the group leaders’ instructional lead became more collaborative as the members began to feel more self-confident and able to contribute to group learning when undertaking the writing activity and writing in English individually, thus enabling the groups to act more collectively when undertaking these sessions. This type of scaffolding has been called “collective scaffolding” by Chao and Lo (2011) and Li and Zhu (2017). Our study found how remarkably well and quickly the appointed group leaders instinctively inhabited their leadership role and gained enthusiastic and engaged responses from their group members.

Regarding group leaders as affective domain supporters, as self-reported by the participants, their group leaders’ feedback increased their motivation towards writing in English. Also, receiving praise and motivational phrases from their group leaders increased group members’ self-confidence and motivated them to continue their efforts to write in English. This kind of learning, rapport and collaboration was something they claimed they had never experienced in their English lessons and they expressed satisfaction at their perceived success in this venture.

As commented previously, when the facilitators' guidance was, for the most part, withdrawn during the early stages of the CW activity, participants felt an instructional gap and a need to select a group leader to provide a structure and support. They did this on the basis of their chosen peer leader's perceived confidence and knowledge about how to chair a group discussion, their decision-making ability about what to write in a session and their better knowledge of English. It can be inferred from the findings especially on the evidence of how the group leaders adopted a rather traditional teacher role that participants held rather traditional views of foreign language learning in the Turkish context, that is, they believed in teacher-centred learning and that, grammar predominantly is learnt through formulae, while vocabulary is learnt through translating Turkish into the target language (English). This reflects what is a culturally constructed model of the teacher, (Maple, 1997) with the expectation and experience of a passive learner role accustomed to test preparation in Turkish classrooms that initially might have restricted the participants' vision in terms of what they were being asked to do in a peer context. However, and this we feel is a key finding of this research, as the groups undertook their collaboration, the group leaders developed a more cooperative, shared and informal style of leadership that the group participants said they found enlightening, empowering and helpful for their learning.

Our observations from the participants' self-reported accounts lead us to suggest that in their classroom experience, writing activities in English lessons were implemented through the product-oriented rather than the process-oriented approach (Badger & White, 2000) whereby the end of product of writing is considered to be more important than the process. Before the study, it was believed by the participants that the only appropriate reader and marker of their writing was their English teacher. However, it was observed during the study that the participants made ample use of technology, such as websites and mobile applications as well as seeing themselves as a resource for each other's learning, (Black & Wiliam, 2009)

in order to access linguistic information and/or check the linguistic correctness of their writing and their task was duly completed within the seven weeks. The participants commented forcefully on the power of constructive and helpful feedback that included humour and affection, never mocking or negative, a student perspective worthy of note in a subject domain (ELT/ Languages) that is prone to anxiety- inducing (Kurt & Atay, 2007).

Even though our sample consists of only 6 participants (in two groups of 3), it explored the web-based CW activity among Turkish EFL learners in a high school, a context previously unresearched and gained valuable insights. For generalisation of our findings, it would be necessary to extend the sample and conduct the research in different types of Turkish high schools.

We are aware of issues concerning the use of data based mainly on student self-reported accounts but since this study has been precisely about the student/participant perceptions of peer collaboration, the student interactions and perceptions have been the main source of the investigation in this research and have been valued and privileged as such. We concur with Docherty and Sandelowski, for example, (1999:177) who write that students can be seen as ‘the best sources of information about themselves’. We also consider the student voice in this research as a source of richness rather than weakness by providing new insights that enable a better understanding of peer learning, collaboration and leadership as seen from the students’ own perception and agree with Flutter and Rudduck (2004:7) who concluded from their study of consulting pupils that: ‘Pupils of all ages can show a remarkable capacity to discuss their learning in a considered and insightful way and that the opportunity to participate in a learning- focused dialogue may also have a beneficial effect on pupils’ performance’.

There are pedagogical implications from the findings of this current study. First, teachers of EFL in Turkey and potentially in other contexts where teacher-led instruction predominates can consider implementing similar CW activities during English lessons. Teachers of EFL can consider setting, group size and composition task type and the duration of a CW activity. Concerning group size, we showed the small group ($n = 3$) format generated powerful peer affective factors. Concerning task type, we recommend teachers of EFL choose short story writing when implementing CW activities. In this study, participants found short story writing engaging and motivating as well as being a manageable task in its brevity, simple structure and scope for collaborative and different types of input. Concerning the duration of a CW activity, previous studies refer to undertaking of CW activities within one session (about 25- 40 minutes) (e.g. Li & Zhu, 2013) and also over a period of time (e.g. 5 weeks in Chao & Lo, 2011). We asked our participants to undertake a single writing exercise over seven weeks which allowed us to investigate the nature of peer collaboration in the context of EFL writing. The key point is to allow enough time for the students to develop collaborative group working capacity of 'trust, support and communication skills' as identified in Kutnick et al. (2005:352) so as to enable them to work productively and enhance their peer affective skills alongside their cognitive skills.

Second, we opted for a CW activity in a FB group. We did not experience difficulty showing the participants how to use FB group because they were already competent in and enthusiastic about using it for. Moreover, FB can be downloaded as a mobile application to smartphones. This was important since some students in this study indicated the limited availability of laptops and desktop computers which would be potentially disadvantageous to those students.

When writing collaboratively in a web-based setting, participants showed new ways of presenting and organising their ideas and showed new ways of approaching a writing task. The use of FB was natural for participants, they felt comfortable with it. During the task they also used several tools like online dictionaries and other resources, such as Google Translate, and websites concerned with English language grammar explanations.

The findings provide a springboard for researchers who are interested in investigating further the topic of web-based CW in an EFL context, for example, the development of the role of peer leadership. The initial dependency on group leaders in the task reflects the cultural context of the everyday Turkish EFL classroom, which is mainly teacher-led and which the participants reported they had been accustomed to when asked to describe their language learning histories. However, in this study, we have shown how group leaders in peer collaboration develop and mature to enhance their own self-efficacy in peer leadership and how they use peer affective factors in their group members' learning. They also promote a more shared leadership approach as group members gradually find their voice. It could be useful for researchers who wish to apply a student-centred approach to learning, to further explore peer collaboration in different age ranges, at different EFL proficiency levels and at different types of schools and to investigate the written outcomes of the students. How peer leadership dynamics are evidenced and evolve in other contexts and over time would add to the knowledge in the field of peer leadership in peer collaboration in promoting writing skills as would studies overviewing the writing skills themselves. We conclude that the influence of group leaders had a positive influence when in a culture of trust and friendship and when learners felt comfortable with their peers.

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Tables

Appendices

Appendix A

Guide for the writing activity

Session 2

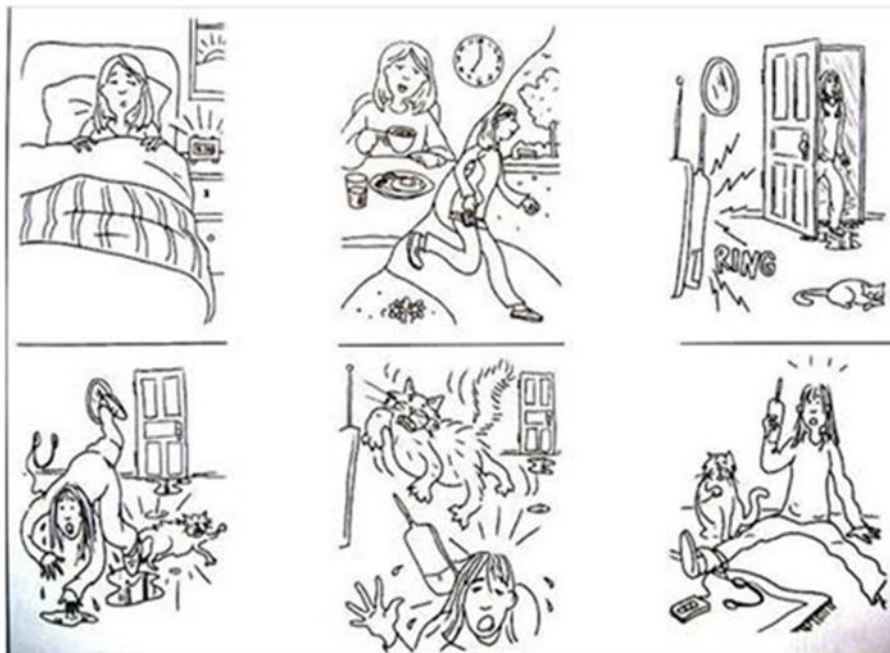
Hi everyone, I'm posting the collaborative writing activity. Hope you'll enjoy it! Please let me know if you have any queries or anything which is not clear. Let's begin...

The girl in the picture below is Sally. I'd like to discuss together and write a short story about Sally. The six picture frames may help you to produce your story. It'd like to note that you don't have to describe all the events in the picture frames. This is just a guide for you to prepare yourselves for writing.

I look forward to meeting you on Thursday.

Good luck!

Hasan Selcuk



Appendix B

Timeline of the group A's (participants P1, P2 & P3) writing

| Week | Session | Duration | Descriptions |
|------|-----------|-----------------|---|
| 1 | Session 1 | 40 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This group and the facilitator discussed short story writing in a Facebook group. |
| 2 | Session 2 | 1 hour | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants were guided with six picture frames (see Appendix A) to start their short story.• This group had problems starting a discussion.• P1 was elected as the group leader by her group members. |
| 3 | Session 3 | 1 hr 20 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• P1 (the group leader) came up with an idea about how to start writing the story.• P1 encouraged P2 and P3 to make suggestions on her idea.• Considering the suggestions of P2 and P3, P1 made her final decision about what to write in this session and allocated tasks to P2, P3 and herself.• Tasks were: P1 asked P2 to write the personal characteristics and P3 the physical characteristics of the main character of the story. P1 described the basic details of the main character (e.g. age, job, where the main character of the story lived and worked). P1 asked P2 and P3 to complete this individual task in 15 minutes.• When P2 and P3 were undertaking their individual tasks, they also had some linguistic support from P1 (e.g. P1 explained a grammar topic a vocabulary item). |

| | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------------|--|
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When all group members finished their individual writing tasks, they posted in their Facebook group. • P1 combined all group members' individual writing tasks including hers and asked P2 and P3 to check the grammar and vocabulary, spelling and meaning. • The group discussed further and added their feedback and finally P1 posted the final version of the task. |
| 4 | Session 4 | 1 hr 50 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P1 divided the six picture frames into three pairs and allocated individual task to each member including her. P1 gave 20 minutes to complete this task. • P2 and P3 asked questions about how to reflect their ideas in their writing in English to P1 when they were undertaking their individual tasks. • When each group member had finished their tasks, they posted their piece of writing in their Facebook group. • P1 gathered all the pieces of writing and formed one piece of writing. • Later on, P1 asked P2 to correct only the grammar and P3 to correct vocabulary and spelling. • When P2 and P3 corrected the errors, P1 detected further grammar and vocabulary errors. • At the end of the session, P1 posted the final version of the writing piece of this session. |
| | Session 5 | 50 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P1 opened the floor for discussion about what to add on their short story. |

| | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------------|--|
| 5 | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P2 and P3 made suggestions. P1 considered their suggestions and all group members started adding to their story under the leadership of P1. • At the end of the session, all group members had added in total 280 words to their story. |
| | Session 6 | 40 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This group continued with adding to their story under the leadership of P1. • By the end of the session, the group members added 200 words all together to their story. |
| 6 | Session 7 | 1 hour | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All group members had added in a total of 100 words more to their story and finalised their short story. |
| 7 | Session 8 | 30 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participants edited their whole story together. |
| | Session 9 | 45 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participants further edited their whole story and collectively decided upon its title. |
| | Session10 | 1 hr 30 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another discussion board was created for both groups. Each group posted the final version of their short story there and gave peer-feedback to other group's short story. |

Note. Group A spent 40 minutes in session 1 (the introductory session), 475 minutes (7.9 hours) from session 2 to session 9 (the sessions about the collaborative story writing activity), and 90 minutes in session 10 (the inter-group feedback session).

Appendix C

Timeline of the group B's (participants P4, P5 & P6) writing

| Week | Session | Duration | Descriptions |
|------|-----------|----------------|---|
| 1 | Session 1 | 50 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">The group and the facilitator discussed short story writing. |
| 2 | Session 2 | 1 hr 5 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Participants were guided with the six picture frames (see Appendix A) to start their short story.This group had problems starting a discussion.P6 was elected as a group leader by her group members. |
| 3 | Session 3 | 50 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">P6 (the group leader) divided the picture frames into three pairs and allocated each pair of pictures to their group members including her.P6 gave 20 minutes to P4 and P5 to undertake this individual task. P6 asked P4 and P5 to write maximum 10 sentences and no more than 100 words.When all group members had completed their individual task, they posted their piece of writing in Facebook group.P6 combined all writing pieces and checked the linguistic errors.P6 explained to P4 and P5 where they had made the linguistic errors.P6 posted the final version of the text on Facebook group. At the end of the session, all the group members had produced in total 280 words. |

| | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------------|--|
| 4 | Session 4 | 2 hours | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P6 started to give directions to P4 and P5 how to lead the story. The group collectively continued adding to the story. • At the end of the session, all the group members had produced in total 300 words. |
| 5 | Session 5 | 1 hr 5 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This group continued with adding to their story under the leadership of P6. • At the end of the session, the group had produced 340 words. |
| | Session 6 | 1 hr 30 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This group ended their short story under the leadership of P6. • At the end of the session, the group had produced 248 words. |
| 6 | Session 7 | 43 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P6 combined the whole story and asked P4 and P5 to help her. |
| 7 | Session 8 | 34 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participants edited their drafts together. |
| | Session 9 | 50 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participants further edited their story and collectively decided upon a title. |
| | Session10 | 1 hr 30 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another discussion board was created for both groups. Each group posted the final version of their short story there and gave peer-feedback to other group's short story. |

Note. Group B spent 50 minutes in session 1 (the introductory session), 517 minutes (8.6 hours) from session 2 to session 9 (the sessions about the collaborative story writing activity), and 90 minutes in session 10 (the inter-group feedback session).

Appendix D

Facilitative questions the facilitator asked the students

- What is peer collaboration for you in this session?
- What do you mean when you talk of peer collaboration in this short story writing?
- How does this peer collaboration in this writing help or hinder your writing in English?
- Could you give an example from your Facebook discussion about how your group membership supported your writing in English? How can you describe this support?
- Do you think that your group membership has helped you write better in English? Could you give an example from your Facebook discussion?
- You meant that you decided to select X participant to your group's leader/teacher, could you describe what made you to choose X as your group's leader/teacher.
- How did your group's leader/teacher help your writing in English during the writing activity? Could you provide an example from your Facebook discussions?
- Did your group's leader/teacher hinder your writing in English during the writing activity? If so, how did it happen? Could you give an example from your Facebook discussions?

Appendix E

A complete list of the praise and motivational phrases used by the group leaders

| Praise | Motivational phrases |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Well done! | You're doing well |
| Excellent | Don't give up |
| Brilliant | Keep on writing |
| Good work | You can do it |
| Bravo | You can write it |
| You're the best writer | We believe you can do it |
| You're a great writer | We're with you |
| You're number 1 | |
| You've got it | |
| Superb | |

